



# LT TORAH TO GO

Volume 13 - Issue 34

Edited by Rabbi Mara Nathan on behalf of generations of Torah Learners at Larchmont Temple.

EXPERIENCE TORAH THIS WEEK: May 11-16  
PRE-ONEG & KABBALAT SHABBAT 6:30PM  
SHABBAT AM SERVICE SATURDAY 10:30AM

SHABBAT BEHAR– BECHUKOTAI 5769  
LEVITICUS 25:1-27:34

pgs.946-970 in Torah, a Modern Commentary

## PSHAT...*The plain/simple story*

*Parashat Behar* presents laws regulating the sabbatical year and the jubilee year. The people are told that for 6 years they are to sow their fields and prune their vineyards, but, during the seventh year, the land is to be given a complete rest, a Sabbath. Every fiftieth year is to be a jubilee year in which land and vineyards must not be worked and in which liberty will be granted to all Israelites enslaved during the previous 49 years. The jubilee year also marks a return of any properties purchased during the previous forty-nine years to the original owner-families who had been given the land at the time the Israelites entered it.

*Parashat Bechukotai* is filled with God's promises to the people if they are loyal and faithfully follow all the commandments and with God's warnings if they disobey. Peace, security, and abundant crops are promised if they are faithful. Misery, suffering and ruin will come if they spurn God's commandments. The portion also includes brief discussions of the payment of vows and gifts made to the sanctuary.

## REMEZ...*Looking for clues*

Six years you may sow your field and six years you may prune your vineyard and gather in the yield. But in the seventh year the land shall have a Sabbath of complete rest, a Sabbath of the Lord: you shall not sow your field or prune your vineyard. Leviticus 25:3-4

### **KOSHI: WHAT IS THE VALUE OF THE SABBATICAL YEAR & HOW DOES IT RELATE TO US TODAY?**

**RAMBAM**...There is a social and ethical benefit of the sabbatical and jubilee years. Such sabbatical and jubilee laws as guaranteeing food for the needy, freeing slaves, canceling debts and returning lands are all meant to teach "sympathy toward others and promote the well being of all." A significant side of these special years is to encourage and instruct Jews to be generous with those in need, to share their profits and products, and to be just in their business practices.

**SEFER HA-CHINUCH**...God commands us not to work the land and not to use its fruits, except for the poor, to remind us that the earth does not yield by itself or even by human cultivation. There is a God who commands its produce. There is no nobler generosity than giving without expecting returns....Just as God grants food during the years of rest, human beings are commanded to leave produce for the needy and hungry, acting out of compassion and generosity.

## DRASH...*Discovering Meaning...*

**SILVERMAN**...a person's span of life normally consists of ten sabbatical periods of seven years each....After you have lived 21 years, or three sabbatical periods, "instead of saying that you have forty nine years ahead of you, you should say that you have only seven more sabbatical periods to live. And so you see the days of your life are all too short. You will better appreciate how precious time is when you think of life in terms of sabbatical periods and not of one year at a time. This is what the commandment to observe the sabbatical year teaches us.

*Yashar Koach* to this week's B'nei Mitzvah:

**BRAD POGOSTIN & CHARLOTTE RIEDER**

*Come hear them teach Torah this Saturday at 10:30AM*

## SOD...Finding Ourselves

....My Koshi is: What is the purpose of the sabbatical year and what does it teach us? According to Rashi, the purpose of the sabbatical year is to give the land time to rest and invigorate itself. This is similar to Shabbat, during which humans are supposed to rest so that they can recharge for the week ahead. Everything and everyone needs time to rest to perform at its best. This connection reminds us not to only take care of ourselves, but the land we live on and the Earth as a whole.

Moses Maimonides thought that the sabbatical year also had a social and ethical benefit. I agree with Maimonides because the sabbatical seems to bring the community together and has everyone helping each other. Maimonides also emphasized that the idea of charity, guaranteeing food for the needy and freeing slaves were essential aspects of the sabbatical and jubilee. However, I don't necessarily agree with Maimonides when he refers to cancelling debt and returning land. Although all of these actions were all meant to teach sympathy and promote the well being of all, it is unfair for people to not pay back their debts and then just have them cancelled like nothing ever happened.

In today's modern economy, this cancellation of debt would be impractical. So how does this relate to us today? Well, even though most Jews don't observe the idea of the sabbatical or jubilee anymore, we are still supposed to commit acts of Tikkun Olam to help repair the world. For example, when you donate food you are helping to make sure that the needy do not have to be hungry and when we do our part to protect the environment, we make the Earth a cleaner, nicer place to live.

**-BRAD**

...The portion B'Chukotai deals with the rewards and punishments set forth by God. ....B'Chukotai states that if you follow every one of God's commandments, you will have a good life. It also says that people who do not listen to God will be punished in all sorts of awful ways.

My question is, does it always work this way? There are people who have done some very bad things but seem to be the wealthiest, happiest people in the world. We also know people who live good, honest lives, yet still seem to be working extra hours every day just to put food on the table. Why does this happen? How can we believe in this system of rewards and punishments when unfair things happen all the time?

Rabbi Eleazer ben Simeon thinks that humans have a balance among good and evil and their next deed will tip the scale and decide whether they are rewarded or punished. He thinks that sins outnumbering good deeds, even if only by a small margin, will get you punished. It might be one deed that decides your entire life....

Personally, I don't find...[this] statement satisfactory or helpful, but I don't have a complete answer of my own. Sometimes, in life, it is impossible to explain why something bad happens to someone who doesn't deserve it. I do have a theory, though. It is this: everything is not what it seems. Something might seem really bad at first, but it might not be that way if you look at the big picture. For example, a family experiences a crisis of some sort, and as they make their way through this hard time they grow closer and more understanding of each other. Something good came from something seemingly terrible. This doesn't always happen, and sometimes there isn't an upside, but in some cases there are.

My Torah Portion teaches me a very important lesson. It teaches me not to look at something once and assume that my first impression is right. A terrible thing could happen, but something happy could come from that. God's rewards and punishments can be ambiguous, so try to look at everything from a variety of different angles. **CHARLOTTE**

## MITZVAH of the WEEK...

**BRAD** spent the day collecting garbage on the beach on Fire Island. "I had never realized how much garbage there was. I would collect the garbage from one area along the beach and one time there was garbage in the same spot 5 minutes later. I was so sad to see that this great place had so much garbage..... Even though this was hard work, I felt good about doing my part to help protect the land that we enjoy so much that God gave us."

**CHARLOTTE** is volunteering at the Coachman family center. "I was in what they called the "Rec Room," helping kids with homework and tutoring them. These children living in this homeless center never did anything to deserve being homeless, but along with many other volunteers, I feel as if I am helping, in a small way, to make their lives a little bit easier. By doing this, people who have suffered for no apparent reason do get some help in their difficult situations."